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- » Creating content that generates leads and sales
- » Spreading brand awareness to cold prospects
- » Planning content marketing campaigns
- » Using the four major content distribution methods

Chapter 4

Pursuing Content Marketing Perfection

Content is at the heart and soul of any digital marketing campaign — the foundation on which your search, social, email, and paid traffic campaigns are built. Without content, Google has nothing to discover on your website, Facebook Fans have nothing to share, newsletters have no news, and paid traffic campaigns become one-dimensional sales pitches.

Content goes beyond blogging; content includes YouTube videos, product and pricing pages on e-commerce sites, social media updates, and much more. Each piece of content acts as a stepping stone on the path from lead to customer, and from customer to engaged, frequent buyer.

Part 2 of this book is about generating fans, followers, and customers using content. This chapter begins that quest by outlining the often-misunderstood strategy behind content marketing. We examine the many different forms that content marketing takes and its uses throughout a prospect's journey toward becoming a loyal customer.

Knowing the Dynamics of Content Marketing

At its core, the Internet is a place where people gather to **discover**, **interact** with, and **share** content. Whether that content is a funny cat video that gives you a much-needed laugh, an inspiring podcast about a single mom surviving cancer, or an article teaching you how to fix a leaky faucet, **content** is what people **crave**.

Engaging with **valuable content** is a natural, or “**native**,” **experience** on the Internet. People are drawn to content that **teaches** them something, **inspires** them, or makes them **laugh or cry**, and people **share** and **talk** about content that has provided them some form of **value**.

With the low-cost (or no cost) of publishing platforms such as WordPress, YouTube, and iTunes, even the smallest of brands can produce content for the Web. This ease of publishing, however, is a **double-edged sword** because the **constantly changing nature** of the Internet requires the rapid production of content. Although your brand stands to **reap** the enormous rewards associated with content publishing, doing so **without a plan** can lead to frustration.

People have a nearly **insatiable demand** for content on the Internet. According to the most conservative estimates, every minute more than 1,000 blog posts are produced and 500 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute. This glut of content underscores the importance of proceeding with content marketing only after you have made a plan, because you must create quality content to cut through the noise. And quality demands a plan. Without a plan, your content assets still have a chance to go viral, but that’s more than likely to be the result of dumb luck. A plan helps to ensure the success of your digital marketing campaign.



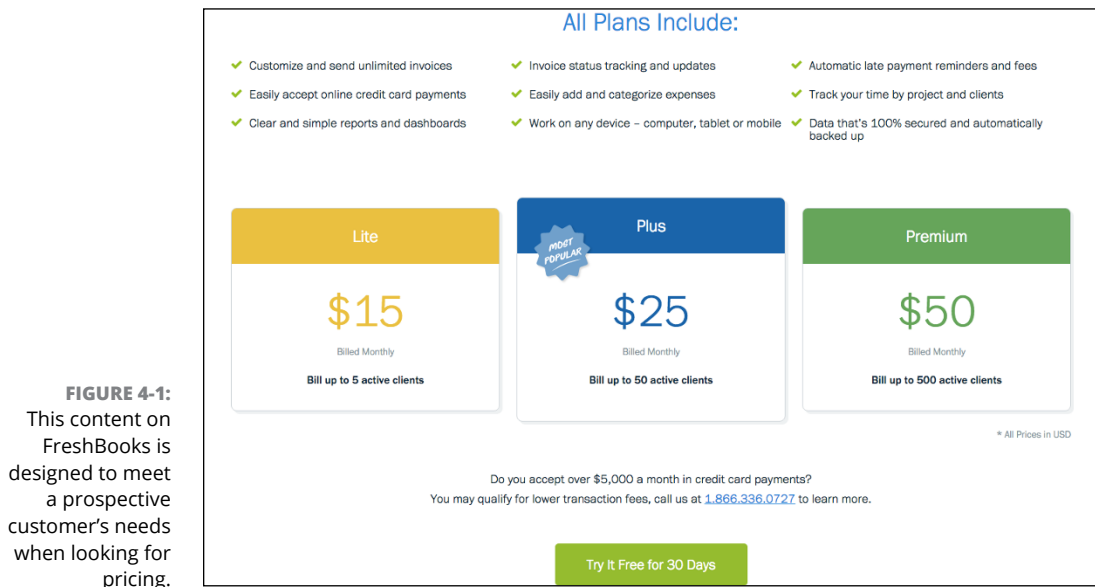
TIP

Marketers often confuse the term **blogging** with *content marketing*. Although blogging is a **powerful and versatile content marketing channel**, it’s only **one part** of a well-balanced content strategy. If you’re among the many marketers who blog with no clear direction, you should commit a few hours to designing a content plan before writing another blog post. Well-executed content marketing includes planning **what content** you will produce, for **what audience**, and for **what purpose**. Many companies and personal brands that are frustrated with digital marketing can trace that frustration back to the time-consuming act of creating content with no clear audience or objective. You’ll find the entire process much easier and much more lucrative when you have a good sense of your direction.

Finding Your Path to Perfect Content Marketing

Although “perfect” content marketing may sound like **hype**, it’s actually **obtainable**. When you gain an understanding of the **true principles** of this critical discipline and content marketing’s connection to all other **facets** of your digital marketing mix, you can quickly see the **path to content marketing perfection**.

Content marketing is about **anticipating the needs** of your customers and prospects, and **building content** assets that **satisfy** those needs. For example, the cloud-based software company FreshBooks anticipated a prospective customer’s need for pricing information. The web page shown in Figure 4-1 represents perfect content marketing in this scenario: The content **succinctly** and clearly communicates the differences in its plans and the **varying price levels**, provides contact information for those who may have more questions and want to talk to a representative, and offers a **free trial**. The content on this page completely satisfies the need for pricing information.



Source: <https://www.freshbooks.com/pricing>

For a prospective customer of FreshBooks to make an informed buying decision, the pricing page is **necessary**. Before they commit, people want to know what they’re buying and how much it will cost. Failure to conveniently provide that information for the prospect will **result in lost sales**.

Understanding the marketing funnel

The path from stranger to buyer is often conveyed using the metaphor of a **funnel**. **Ice-cold prospects** enter the wide top of the funnel and some, you hope, exit through the much narrower bottom of the funnel as **customers**. Content can, and should, assist the prospect in **graduating** from one stage of the marketing funnel to the next.

A basic marketing funnel has three stages that take a prospect from **stranger** to **buyer**:



TIP

» **Awareness:** The prospect must first become **aware** that he has a **problem** and that you or your organization can provide a **solution**.

Raising **problem and solution awareness** is where your blog will shine. Use your blog to **educate**, **inspire**, or **entertain** prospects and existing customers.

» **Evaluation:** Those who move through the awareness stage must now evaluate the **various choices available** to them, including your competitor's solutions and, of course, taking **no action** to solve the problem at all. People can, after all, decide to live with the problem and **not purchase** the product or service that could solve that problem.

» **Conversion:** Those who move through the evaluation stage are at the moment of truth — **purchase**. The goal at this stage is to convert leads into **frequent and high-ticket buyers**.



REMEMBER

These three stages of awareness, evaluation, and conversion form what is known as a **marketing funnel**. Figure 4-2 conceptualizes the marketing funnel.

Cold prospects cannot evaluate your solution until they are first aware of the problem *and* of your solution. If prospects are unaware of the problem or the solution that you offer through your product or service, they obviously won't buy. Therefore, conversions are impossible until prospects have first evaluated the possible courses of action they can take, which include buying your product, buying a competitor's product rather than yours, or doing nothing and living with the problem. To move prospects **through a marketing funnel**, you need to provide **content** designed to satisfy their needs at each of the three stages:

» Content at the top of the funnel (**TOFU**) that facilitates awareness.

» Content at the middle of the funnel (**MOFU**) that facilitates evaluation.

» Content at the bottom of the funnel (**BOFU**) that facilitates conversion.

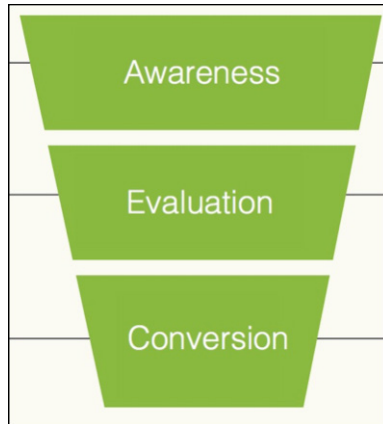


FIGURE 4-2:
The three-step
marketing funnel.

Source: <http://www.digitalmarketer.com/content-marketing/>



TIP

Blogs are fantastic facilitators of awareness (top of funnel) — but they do a poor job of facilitating evaluation (middle of funnel) and conversion (bottom of funnel). Also, at the risk of pointing out the obvious, evaluation and conversion are super critical to your business. To move prospects through the middle and bottom of the funnel, you need other content types, as shown in Figure 4-3 and explained in detail in the following sections.

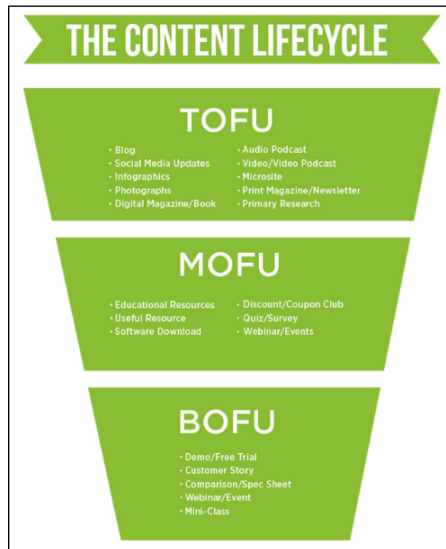


FIGURE 4-3:
You need
different content
types at each
stage of the
marketing funnel.

Source: <http://www.digitalmarketer.com/content-marketing/>

Top of funnel (TOFU) content marketing

The prospects entering the top of your funnel are unaware of your **solution** and often unaware that they even have a **problem** that needs to be solved. As a result, you need content that people can **freely access**, as opposed to content that requires prospects to give you their contact information or make a purchase. After all, you have yet to prove your value to them.

At the top of the funnel, make **free ungated content** (which we cover in greater detail in Chapter 3) available that provides one of the following **values**

- » Entertains
- » Educates
- » Inspires

Choose two to three of the following content types to deliver TOFU content that will raise awareness about the solutions you provide through your products or services:

- » **Blog posts:** Arguably the **most recognized form** of online content, blogs are an excellent way of raising awareness. For example, the fashion company J. Crew raises awareness of the products it sells by creating blog posts about fashion styles and tips for accessorizing. The J. Crew blog reader (and potential customer) gets some inspiration and solutions to the problem of what to wear and how to look fashionable; the post also alludes to the fact that J. Crew carries the clothing needed to pull off the look.
- » **Social media updates:** As with blogs, social media platforms (such as Facebook) are **fantastic at creating awareness**. Whether it's a Pinterest board by Dreyer's Ice Cream that lists every flavor of ice cream the company sells, or a tweet by Airbnb about the ten perfect Paris food experiences, these social media updates give their followers free, valuable information while also bringing the solutions their company provides to the forefront.
- » **Infographics:** Infographics are an interesting and engaging way to display content. Typically, infographics contain **fun images with contrasting**, eye-catching colors, and the way infographics break up text makes this form of content **easily consumable** by the viewer. Infographics are highly effective at delivering content that is both entertaining and educational, quickly. Whether it's an infographic by IMDb about the best of the year in movie entertainment, or an infographic by Casper Mattress providing tips on better sleeping habits, this type of content delivers value that a consumer wants, and it raises brand awareness effectively as well.

- » **Photographs:** Pictures are powerful because they can explain a lot in a single image. Photographs also help to break up blocks of text in a piece of content, which keeps that content from becoming boring or intimidating to read. With a photograph, a kitchen design company can show completed projects that effectively demonstrate what the company does while raising awareness of what the company can do for another customer's kitchen.
- » **Digital magazines and books:** Digital magazines and books are popular, and are another way to distribute content and raise brand awareness. E-books and e-magazines are similar to the blog strategies discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Therefore, you can look to your blog to inspire your content for your e-book or e-magazine.
- » **Audio and video podcasts:** Another form of content that you can use at the top of the funnel is a podcast. With a podcast, you package and distribute your content differently from textual content. A podcast delivers consumable content on the go. Subscribers can listen to the podcast on their commute to work or during their workout, or any other time they choose. They have a more flexible way to consume the content, in contrast to a blog post or a social media update that is less conducive to multitasking. Also, you can use podcasts to effectively promote your product or service while providing value to your prospects. If you sell outdoor equipment, for example, each episode of your podcast can give tips and tricks about hunting, fishing, camping, and other outdoor activities while also subtly reminding your listener of the outdoor equipment available at your store.
- » **Microsites:** A microsite is essentially an auxiliary blog about a specific topic that is put on a different site with its own links and address; a microsite is accessed mainly from a larger site. For instance, DadsDivorce.com is a separate domain of the men's family law firm Cordell & Cordell. DadsDivorce.com provides free content for divorcing fathers and is designed to raise awareness about the services and solutions Cordell & Cordell can provide.
- » **Print magazines and newsletters:** This type of content can require a bigger budget than digital content, but if going this route falls within your budget, print magazines and newsletters are still a great way to raise awareness. For example, the *Lego Club Magazine* contains plenty of entertaining comic book style content for Lego's target customer. Magazines and newsletters help sales by inspiring shoppers based on what they see in print.
- » **Primary research:** This is research you go out and collect yourself, such as surveys, interviews, and observations. Although this data can be difficult and time consuming to gather, primary research is powerful because only a finite amount of primary research exists. Specifically, when you take the time to create research, you're providing a service and saving people from having to do their own primary research. For this reason, primary research can stir a good deal of awareness among your prospects.



TIP

Do you need all these content types at the top of the funnel? Heck, no. Most businesses focus on posting content to a blog and to social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. After you’ve mastered blogging and social media updates, you might want to add more top-of-funnel content to the mix, such as a podcast or a print newsletter.



REMEMBER

The big goal at the top of the funnel is to make prospects “**problem aware**” and “**solution aware**.” In Figure 4-4, notice how Whole Foods uses its Whole Story blog to raise **awareness** for the seafood the grocery store sells. In this way, Whole Foods is reminding its audience of the products it sells, making its audience “**solution aware**” while providing people with recipes they find **valuable**.

FIGURE 4-4:
Whole Foods
raises awareness
of products it
sells while
providing value to
its blog audience.



Source: <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/blog/my-favorite-new-recipes-tilapia-equals-easy-weeknight-dinners-0>

Unfortunately, the top of the funnel is where most organizations begin and end their content marketing efforts. Smart content marketers know that, with a bit more effort, they can move prospects from awareness to evaluation at the middle of the funnel.

Middle of funnel (MOFU) content marketing

The big goal for content you use at the middle of the funnel is to convert “problem aware” and “solution aware” prospects into leads. You’re looking to grow your email lists and gain more leads at this point of the funnel. At DigitalMarketer, we use free content to **incentivize prospects** to submit their contact information (such as their email address) and opt in to receive future marketing in exchange for valuable content. We call this type of content **gated offers**, which we discuss in Chapter 3.



REMEMBER

A *gated offer* is a small “chunk” of value that solves a *specific* problem for a *specific* market and is offered in exchange for **prospects’ contact information**.

Gated offers often take the form of content such as the following:



REMEMBER

» **Educational resources:** As discussed in Chapter 3, educational resources for gated offers often exist in the form of **free reports, white papers, primary research, webinar training, and sales material**. These types of content resources educate the consumer on a particular topic related to your brand while highlighting features of a solution, product, or service you provide. An educational resource can include a case study packed with professional tips and a detailed breakdown of some of your strategies.

Educational resources (and all forms of MOFU content, for that matter) must be of high quality or the consumer is likely to feel cheated. Also, if prospects feel that the content you gave them in exchange for their contact information is subpar, your brand awareness suffers. Keep in mind that the point of the MOFU is to help people evaluate your company and entice them to make a purchase. You entice with quality, not garbage.

» **Useful resources:** Useful resources are tools such as

- Handouts or cheat sheets
- Resource lists
- Templates
- Software
- Surveys
- Assessments
- Discount and coupon clubs
- Quizzes and surveys

We explain these useful tools, which serve as powerful content for MOFU, in Chapter 3. Instead of using a consumer’s time (such as an e-book that may take an hour or more to read), useful resources promise that they will not only educate your prospects but also save them time. These resources save them time because the content is easy to consume and the resource is complete; it doesn’t depend on another resource to deliver its value but can stand alone. For example, a company that sells vegetable gardening tools can create a resource called the “Seed Starting Cheat Sheet” that allows people with an interest in gardening to quickly determine the best time to plant popular vegetables in the garden.



WARNING

Don't pin all your lead-generation hopes to a passive gated offer on your home page or the sidebar of your blog, because the gated offer can get lost among the many elements of your site. A missed gated offer won't capture leads. Be sure to also create a dedicated landing page for every gated offer (some call this a *squeeze page*) and drive traffic directly to that page using social media, email marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and paid traffic. A dedicated landing page, which we go over in more detail in Chapter 7, increases opt-ins. See Figure 4-5 for an example of a landing page.

FIGURE 4-5:
Rideshare company Lyft uses a landing page to start its driver application process.

lyft

Drive Explore Help Log in

Apply Now

Enter your info, and then download the Lyft app to create your driver profile.

First Name

Last Name

Email address

City

Phone number

ROB055729

Terms Apply

☐ I agree to Lyft's terms of service

BECOME A DRIVER

Already applied? [Check the status of your application here.](#)

Get a \$400 bonus

Apply now, and reap the benefits right away: Get an extra \$2.67 for every ride you give in your first 30 days, up to \$400. [See terms.](#)

Source: <https://www.lyft.com/drive-with-lyft?ref=ROB055729>

The goal at the middle of the funnel is to convert prospects who were unaware of your product or service into people with whom you can now follow up. As they say, however, you can't deposit leads in the bank. To generate revenue, you need content that assists your prospects in making decisions at the point of sale.

Bottom of funnel (BOFU) content marketing

At the BOFU, you're looking to convert **leads** into **customers** and **customers** into **higher-ticket customers**. What types of content will your new lead need to make an informed purchase decision? Your leads may be reading your blog and downloading your gated offers (all of which helps to convert them), but to move them on through to the point of making a purchase, you also need to offer content that helps them **decide whether to buy**.

Here are examples of content types that work well at the bottom of the funnel:

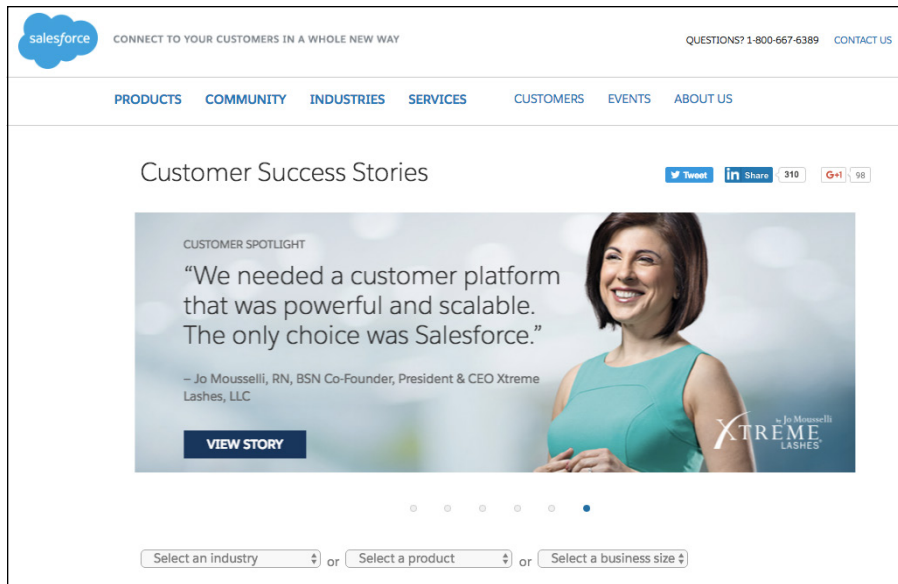
- » **Demos:** The downside of buying a product online is that customers can't hold the product in their hands — they have only an image (or two) and a description to base their purchasing decisions on, which can make people hesitate to buy. Offering a demo can help with this problem. A demo shows the product or service you offer in action, so that consumers can see how it works. It's as close to touching the product as they can get from their screen. So find a way to demonstrate your product or service through content such as video, screen shots, webinars, or schematic drawings.
- » **Customer stories:** Customer stories are customer testimonials and reviews. Customer stories are fantastic at the bottom of the funnel because they allow a prospect to see how someone else experienced success with your product or service. You provide your prospects with peer reviews, which have a powerful effect on decision making. As shown in Figure 4-6, Salesforce.com supplies leads who are at the BOFU with plenty of customer success stories to prove that its product can take care of their needs.
- » **Comparison/spec sheets:** When someone at the BOFU is debating over different products, comparisons and spec sheets are handy resources that people use to compare products side by side (whether the comparison is between similar products that you offer or between your product and your competitor's product). For example, the tax preparation software company TurboTax might show a side-by-side comparison to the features and pricing of its competitor, TaxAct.
- » **Webinars/events:** As previously stated in this chapter and Chapter 3, you can use webinars and events at the middle of the funnel to gather leads, but you can also use them at the bottom of the funnel to convert those leads. At the bottom of the funnel, a webinar can be used to gather prospective customers in one place to ask questions about a complex, risky, or high-ticket product or service.
- » **Mini-classes:** A mini-class is a type of event that you set up to teach a relevant topic to your target audience. At the end of the short class, you make your pitch for your product or service. You need to provide quality educational resources with the mini-class, but in the end, the purpose of the class is to pitch a higher-dollar product related to the class you just held.



TIP

Is creating content that drives awareness at the top of the funnel important? Absolutely. That said, particularly for existing brands, the place to start building content is usually at the bottom of the funnel. Your prospects need information such as pricing or how you compare to a competitor, so build content that satisfies those basic questions before you start writing blog posts or uploading podcasts.

FIGURE 4-6:
Salesforce
creates content
that converts at
the BOFU by
telling customer
success stories.



Source: <http://www.salesforce.com/customers/>

Exploring the prospect's intent

The key to perfect content marketing is to understand your prospects' existing intent so that you can anticipate their future intent and predict which path or paths they will take. In foreseeing this, you can create the content assets needed to address that intent 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Returning to the FreshBooks example, the software company that we refer to earlier in the chapter, a customer in the evaluation or conversion stage of the funnel might intend to compare FreshBooks to QuickBooks. The web page shown in Figure 4-7 satisfies that intent at both the middle and the bottom of the funnel. FreshBooks gives the prospect a comparison sheet that allows the customer to see the differences between FreshBooks and its competition, QuickBooks. The company knows that prospective customers want to see how it stacks up against QuickBooks. Satisfying that intent in the evaluation stage helps prospects move into the conversion stage.



TIP

If you're having difficulty brainstorming ideas for content that will satisfy your prospects' intent, gather a group of people in your organization who have contact with your customers and prospects. Salespeople, customer service representatives, trade-show workers, and others who hear the voice of the customer and prospect should be present. These members of your team can help you discover holes in your content that would satisfy a prospect's intent.

FIGURE 4-7:
FreshBooks uses
a comparison
sheet to move a
prospect closer to
conversion.

Accounting Purpose-Built for Small Business Owners		
Frustrated by slow, bloated accounting software? FreshBooks is easy to use, backed by award-winning support and loved by millions.		
	FRESHBOOKS clear accounting	QuickBooks
Invoices, expenses, and reports	✓	✓
Web and mobile access	✓	✓
Free online and phone support	✓	✓
Designed for service-based small business owners	✓	✗
Built-in time tracking features	✓	✗
Project tracking	✓	✗
Multi-currency billing	✓	✗
Late payment reminders	✓	✗
Award-winning customer support	✓	✗
Industry leading customer happiness score	✓	✗
Free trial period	30 Days	30 Days
Paid plans start at	\$12.95/month	\$12.95/month
* All prices in USD		

Source: <https://www.freshbooks.com/compare/quickbooks-alternative>

Brainstorm lists of intent at the top, middle, and bottom of the funnel. Then decide what content assets need to be built to satisfy that intent from awareness through conversion.

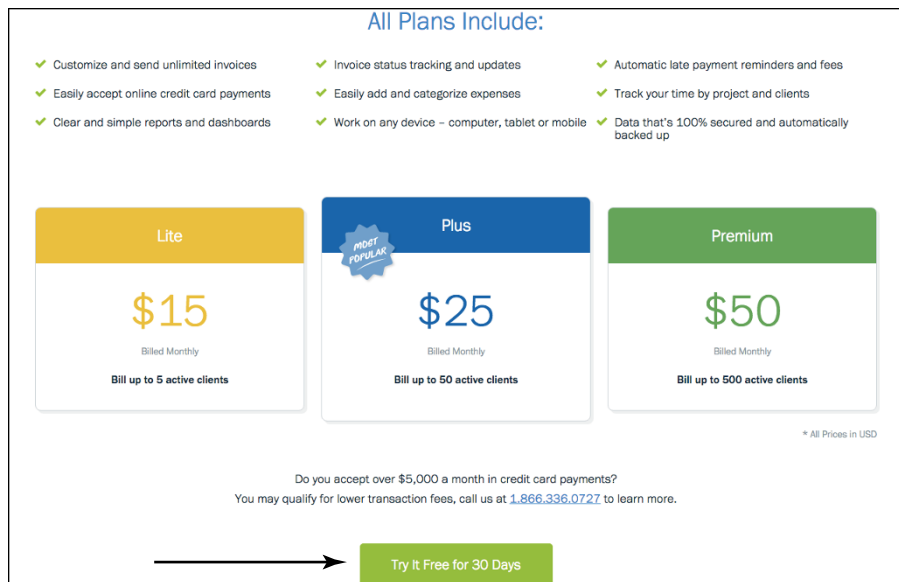
Providing a path to the next step

As a marketer, you need to provide a path from one piece of content to the next. People are busy and don't have the time or the patience to go digging through your site for the proper piece of content. They need to be able to find what they're looking for fast.

Failing to provide an easy-to-follow path to the next step isn't just bad marketing, it's a bad user experience, one that will cause people to hit the Back button on your site and leave it altogether. Smart content marketers anticipate the next logical intent and remove as much "friction" as possible to create a clear path to conversion.

The goal of every piece of content is to get the prospect to ascend to the next logical step in the customer journey. In the FreshBooks pricing page example shown in Figure 4-8, notice that FreshBooks has created a clear ascension path to a "Risk-Free Trial" of the software. Creating an ascension path is good marketing and results in a good user experience.

FIGURE 4-8: FreshBooks anticipates the next logical intent of a visitor who needs to obtain pricing information.



Source: <https://www.freshbooks.com/pricing>



TIP

How well an ascension offer performs depends on the relevance of the offer. Take time to anticipate the next logical step in the customer journey and create offers that are applicable to the piece of content they are currently consuming. For example, asking a visitor to listen to a podcast episode (a top-of-funnel content type) would be neither logical nor relevant from the FreshBooks pricing page in Figure 4-8. This person is visiting the pricing page because she is interested in buying, and the smart marketer anticipates that intent and makes the next logical offer — a free trial.

Segmenting your marketing with content

You won't truly understand your audience and what people really want until they have given you one of two things: their time or their money. They may answer survey questions and make comments that they are interested in this or that, but until they have committed a precious resource — time or money — you don't know for sure what interests them. This is good news for anyone creating content online, because when people spend time with content, they are showing interest.

For example, imagine that you own a company that sells healthy and nutritious meals to busy professionals, and you've been creating blog content about nourishing recipes. Your content falls into three main categories of recipes: vegan, vegetarian, and gluten free. What do you know about someone who visits a blog post about vegan recipes? Likewise for someone visiting a blog post about vegetarian

recipes. It's pretty clear, right? These people have "raised their hands" and told you that they are (or are interested in becoming) vegan or vegetarian.

When people spend their valuable time consuming content, they are segmenting themselves. They are telling you what interests them. And thanks to the magic of ad retargeting, you can follow up with these prospects by using a relevant ascension offer without having to acquire their contact information.

Retargeting is the process of advertising to people based on their prior behavior. For example, you can configure retargeting ads so that they appear only to customers who bought a particular product or visited (showed interest) a particular product page or blog post. This approach allows you to show a very specific piece of content that is more likely to resonate with the segmented audience. Turn to Chapter 10 for more information on ad retargeting strategies.

Appearing everywhere your customer expects

Marketers who want to create perfect content need to publish where their customers are. That means publishing content that meets prospects' intent in any channel, and at every stage of the funnel where groups of prospects are searching for and sharing content. These channels include but are certainly not limited to the following:

- » A website or blog
- » Facebook
- » Twitter
- » LinkedIn
- » Pinterest
- » Instagram
- » YouTube

You can publish a single content asset across numerous channels to maximize exposure. For instance, at DigitalMarketer, we turned a presentation about how to launch a podcast into a webinar, and then into a podcast episode, and finally into a blog post. Because our audience responded so enthusiastically to this content, we saw the value and the need to repurpose it and distribute it throughout our channels.

Consider what content from your company has resonated with your audience. For example, can that video demo of your product be republished on your YouTube channel? Can you repurpose an article from your blog into a webinar, or a podcast episode into an article for LinkedIn? The opportunities to repurpose content are virtually limitless.

Customizing your content

You produce perfect content marketing materials to satisfy the intent of your *customer avatars* (also known as target audience or customer persona). But not all avatars are the same; they, like their real-life counterparts, don't all want or need the same solution. That's why customizing and then segmenting your content is essential. A particular piece of content can satisfy the intent of multiple avatars, or you can use it to target a single avatar.

For example, we produced a blog article called “6 Trending Digital Marketing Skills to Put on a Resume” to raise awareness (top of the funnel) for our marketing certification programs. This post probably wouldn't interest small business owners, but that was fine — we weren't targeting them. This article was specifically targeted to our “employee” avatar whose intent is to acquire skills that will land her a better job. Included in the post are two calls to action, which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is an instruction to your audience designed to convey urgency and provoke an immediate response. In the case of the trending skills blog post, the calls to action are customized to appeal to the “employee” avatar.

Executing Perfect Content Marketing

As we say earlier in this chapter, to execute perfect content marketing, you need a plan. Each offer you make often requires the creation of different pieces of content. As a result, the ideal is to make a content plan for each of your major offers using a resource we call the Content Campaign Plan. The Content Campaign Plan aligns your content marketing with business objectives such as generating leads and sales. You can see the Content Campaign Plan template in Figure 4-9 and can fill out your own by visiting <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/lp/dmfd/content-campaign/>

Following are the steps for creating your first Content Campaign Plan:

1. Choose avatars.
2. Brainstorm content assets.

3. Choose the vehicle and channel.
4. Plan for ascension.

Read on to find out more about each of these steps.

OFFER	AVATAR 1	AVATAR 2	AVATAR 3	AVATAR 4	AVATAR 5		
AWARENESS							
EVALUATION							
CONVERSION							
ASSET	DESCRIPTION		AVATAR(S)	VEHICLE(S)	CHANNEL(S)	OWNER	ASCENSION
ASSET A							
ASSET B							
ASSET C							
ASSET D							
ASSET E							
ASSET F							
ASSET G							

FIGURE 4-9:
The Content Campaign Plan organizes your content strategy for each individual product or service offer.

Source: Internal Document – DigitalMarketer

Step 1: Choosing avatars

Decide which avatars (also known as a buyer persona) this content targets. Because each avatar has different intents, motivations, and problems he responds to, each avatar requires different content to move him through the awareness, evaluation, and conversion stages. You therefore need to determine which existing content to use or what new content to create to move the avatar through the top, middle, and bottom of the funnel.

For example, a wealth management firm attempting to sell financial planning should approach a young professional much differently than a near retiree. Some content will appeal to both, but the most effective content will speak directly to a specific avatar.

Step 2: Brainstorming content assets

Use what you know about your customer avatar to create descriptions for content that you can create to reach that persona.



REMEMBER

Plan to create content at all three stages of the marketing funnel: awareness, evaluation, and conversion. In the wealth management firm example, what content could the firm produce at the top of the funnel to increase awareness for the young professional avatar? What could it produce to move the retiree avatar through the conversion stage?

Step 3: Choosing the vehicle and channel

The *vehicle* of the content refers to the form the content will take. Will it be text, an image, a video, or an audio asset? The *channel* refers to where the asset will be published — such as your blog, a Facebook page, or a YouTube channel.

The vehicle can sometimes determine the channel, and vice versa. For example, a video asset often gets published on YouTube, Facebook, and your blog, whereas an image asset is more likely to be on Pinterest.

Step 4: Planning for ascension

In the final step of the Content Campaign Plan, you connect your content to your business goals. Build offers into each piece of content that allow prospects to get more value, either by consuming more content, giving you their contact information for follow-up, or buying a product or service.



TIP

Any call to action is better than none at all, but the highest-converting ascension offers are relevant to the content the prospect is consuming. For example, a blog post entitled “10 Ways to Grow More Nutritious Organic Tomatoes” would do well to make an offer like “50% Off and Free Shipping on Organic Tomato Seeds” rather than an offer for carrot seeds.

If you want to create content that converts prospects at all stages of the funnel, create a Content Campaign Plan and execute it. It works.

Distributing Content to Attract an Audience

Today, content plays an important role in all major forms of traffic generation. Convincing cold (and even warm) prospects to visit your website is difficult without first leading with valuable content.

The processes you develop to distribute content, and thus generate traffic to it, are as important as the processes surrounding the creation of that content. Entire chapters of this book are devoted to the nuances of traffic generation using the methods of email marketing, search, social media, and paid traffic. However, it's worth mentioning how each of these major traffic generation methods interact with the content you produce.

Marketing through email

Email is still the best method for making offers and sending more content, so growing and maintaining your email lists are critical tasks, which is why growing your email list is built into your content strategy. After you've produced a content asset, such as a blog post or a podcast episode, use your email list(s) to drive traffic to that piece.

To write the email for your new piece of content, first create the subject line of the email message. Often the subject is the same as the title of the content, but there are other strategies to naming your email subject line, such as scarcity headings like "FINAL notice (Just hours left . . .)" or by piquing curiosity with subject lines like "THIS is why I do what I do . . ." We describe these strategies in more detail in Chapter 11.

Next, open your email with a short, punchy introduction that pulls people into the main body of your email, where you pique the email subscriber's interest and describe what he can expect from the content. Explain this email's relevance to the reader and what he has to gain from it (also known as the *benefit*). Also, be sure to include a call to action that instructs the subscriber to click the hyperlink to your content. Use two to three hyperlinked calls to action to make clicking them as convenient as possible.

Capturing leads through search marketing

Search engines, such as Google and Bing, are important content distribution channels to leverage. When prospects reach your site by querying a search engine (they might be searching for “dslr camera reviews” or “crepe recipes” in Google or Bing) but haven’t selected an ad, they are using search marketing. The traffic driven to that content wasn’t paid for but was found naturally by the users.



TIP

Today, search marketing is simple. The search engines, particularly Google, have become adept at sending traffic to the content that is most likely to satisfy the intent of the searcher. If you are committed to creating content assets that satisfy the intent of your various customer avatars, you’ll get plenty of love from Google and other search engines. You can learn more about search marketing in Chapter 8.

Using social media to drive traffic to your site

After you have created a piece of content, use the social media platform(s) that your business participates in to drive traffic to that content. We describe how to use social media in greater detail in Chapter 9, but for now, be aware that driving traffic on social media may take several forms, such as a tweet on Twitter or an update on Facebook or LinkedIn. This update announces the new content and provides a hyperlink to it.

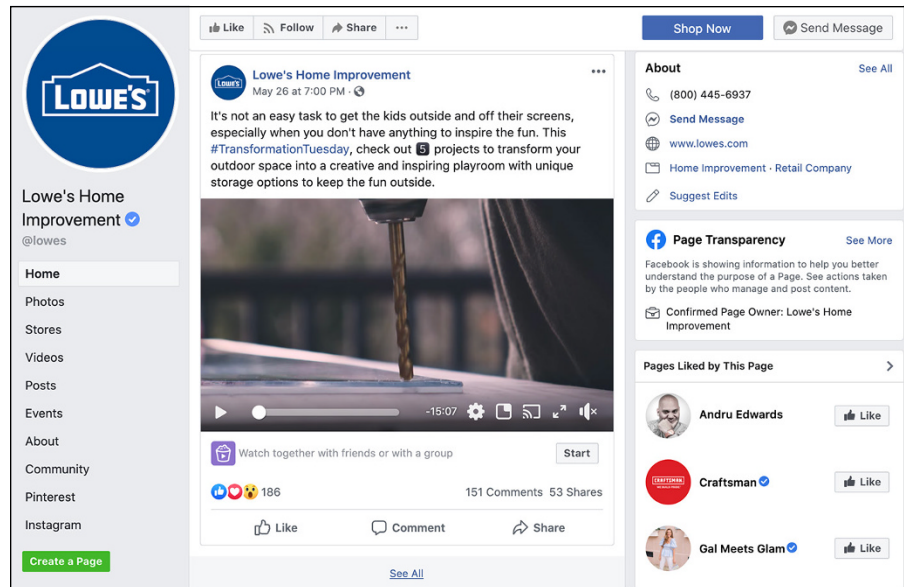
When you write text for a social media update, your brand’s personality should determine how you announce this new content. For instance, if your brand is a refined jewelry store, you may want to use a formal tone in your copy.

The length of the copy depends on restrictions (such as on Twitter) and the complexity of the offer. Simple offers don’t require the same amount of description as complex offers do. Regardless of the length of the copy, be sure that the social media update piques the viewer’s curiosity, describes the benefit of the content, and has a clear call to action, such as the home improvement store Lowe’s Facebook post shown in Figure 4-10. This social media update meets all three of these requirements effectively.

Paying for traffic

As the name suggests, paid traffic takes the form of ads that promote your content and helps your content gain reach, or exposure. You can display ads on many different platforms, including search engines and social media. Paid traffic can be highly effective at generating leads because it helps you to segment your visitors and make use of retargeting.

FIGURE 4-10: On Facebook, Lowe's establishes the benefit of the content and gives a clear call to action for the viewer to "check out" the five transformation projects.



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/lowes/>



REMEMBER

When a prospect visits a piece of content, she places herself into a particular segment of your potential buyers. She's indicating an interest in the offer, topic, problem, or solution found on that page, and you can take advantage of ad retargeting networks such as Google and Facebook to show ads to this prospect based on the content she has visited.

Although many marketers may be reluctant to pay to send traffic to content, such as blog posts and podcasts, paid traffic has a major advantage: It's predictable. When you cut a check to Facebook, for example, to promote a piece of content, you will get traffic. This is why, at all times but especially when buying ads for your content, you must ensure the exceptional quality of your content. The last thing you want to do is spend money to send traffic to poor-quality content.

Use paid traffic to promote quality content that gives value to the consumer and aligns with your business goals. This will help you move people from one part of the funnel to the next, progressing from ice-cold prospect to a lead to customer to repeat customer and, ideally, to raving fan.

Developing a style guide

One of the most important but least talked-about necessities in content publishing is a style guide. Your style guide documents the rules you use every day to make sure the content you produce is consistent across every marketing channel.

This document holds everything from grammar and punctuation rules to an overview of your brand's unique voice.

When a prospect looks at the content you have online, they are partially looking to see what your brand is all about. How you communicate to your audience has a huge affect on your audiences' opinion of your brand. Having a style guide helps you make a strong, cohesive impression that sticks with your audience and distinguishes your brand from your competitors'.

Determine grammar and punctuation rules

The most basic purpose of a style guide is to take a stance on certain grammar and punctuation rules. Grammar and punctuation rules are not as strict and finite as you may remember learning in school. How you use, or subvert, these rules helps to build your brand's unique style.



TIP

Almost every publication business has a style guide, and some of them are accessible to the general public. Research other style guides to help you decide what you should include in your own. Some style guides you could look at include: *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, APA, MLA, AP, and more!

Using the information you gained from researching other style guides, determine what grammar and punctuation rules apply to the content you regularly produce. Some stances you may want to decide on in your style guide could include:

- » Oxford commas: Do you use them, or not?
- » Boldface and italics: When and how do you use them?
- » Headlines: Do you use them, and what do they look like?
- » Do you use multiple punctuation marks, such as "?!"
- » What about slang, provocative language, or profanity?
- » How will you format bullets, numbers, etc?

All of these decisions and more will impact how your audience reads your content and how they react to it. There really are no right or wrong answers here; just make sure the decisions you make about grammar and punctuation align with what you are most commonly doing currently in your content, and that it meshes well with your customers (for example, you wouldn't want to abruptly start using slang if you have not in the past).

Document editorial process

The next step is to document your editorial process. This should ideally encompass the whole process from ideation to publication. Everyone's process is a little different, but documenting what that process is allows you to scale while keeping the quality and consistency of your content high.

When you are documenting (or possibly creating) the editorial process, you want to keep in mind the expectations you have for the process. For example: If you expect the turnaround time for a piece of content to be two days, you aren't going to want to have a super lengthy process. Keep your editorial process reasonable to your expectations and your working capacity.

Here are the different sections of the process you could document:

- » Document the different types of content that are posted on each of your channels (types of blog posts, typical word counts, etc.)
- » Document the process for creating/submitting content for your different platforms
- » Document what the review process looks like for content that was created/submitted
- » Document the publication process, including any SEO content guidelines
- » Finally, you can document how, when, and if you review/update your content

Document brand voice

Face it — every brand has a content strategy, and that strategy is largely the same. However, your brand voice is your content marketing edge. It's what helps differentiate you from your competitors and makes your content difficult to replicate.

Your brand voice is the personality that shines through in your content via the tone, style, and personal signatures of your writing. What you say matters, but *how* you say it can matter just as much.

Often times this voice can come from the founders of the organization and how they talk and write. Other times, it's based off of the way the first writers at the company styled early pieces of content. Regardless of where the voice comes from, keeping things consistent across your channels is a surefire way to keep an audience engaged and consistently returning to your content.

If you are just beginning to develop your brand voice, it can be helpful to try and personify your brand. What famous characters would you say most embodies your brand's traits and ideals? If you had to describe your brand's voice in three adjectives, what would they be? Does your brand's voice say "y'all" or "you all" or "folks" or something else? All of these questions can help you dive deeper into your brand's image and help you sort out a voice.

Determine additional sections

Your style guide is a document that is completely personal to your business, so if there is something else that you think should be included, include it! You could add in the vision, mission, and values for your company, sample writings that show the voice used well, or anything else you can think of that is important to include.

Create formal documentation

After you have all the information you want to include in your style guide, put it all together in a formalized document and get it approved by higher-up team members (if need be). We encourage you to make the document as formalized as possible, so if you typically have guides designed, do that as well!



TIP

If you are on a team of writers, we encourage you to get their input on the style guide as you build it out. The goal is to get a well-rounded view on your brand's voice as a whole, so including a few different team members can help prevent any bias.

Distribute style guide

This is the most important step in the whole process. Having a style guide is only helpful if everyone who touches your content sees it, knows it, and implements it.

If you have a particular place that all your living process documents live, put it there. You could also do a "lunch and learn" when you walk everyone through the document and answer any questions. You should also distribute the document to people via email, Slack, or any other communication mechanisms you use.

The distribution is up to you; just make sure everyone sees the document, and knows where it will live if they need to access it later.